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Unitarian Horizons

September 15, 1937

"SALUTE TO ADVENTURERS"

THIS is the title of one of John Buchan's romantic stories, but it may be taken as a fitting motto for the opening number of this little publication, the purpose of which is to bring a message from the desk of the president of the American Unitarian Association to as many as possible within the fellowship (or outside, if any should wish it), once a month during ten months of the year.

In one sense, it will be a personal message, and I shall not hesitate to use the personal pronoun. At the outset of my term of office, I am par-

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ticularly eager to establish some direct method of contact with individual Unitarians in all parts of the country, so that they may know some of the things that are in the foreground and in the background of my thinking, and also that I may come to know their views and desires. For this latter purpose, I hope my readers will feel free from time to time to communicate directly to me their ideas — not only with respect to matters dealt with in these pages but on any matter that concerns the Unitarian cause.

(I should like to say at this point that the cost of printing and distributing this publication is not charged to the budget of the Association, but will be met by special gifts for this particular purpose.)

But there is another and more important sense in which *Unitarian Horizons* will be much more than a merely personal communication. It is my intention to make it serve as a means to build up a sense of strong loyalty among us — loyalty to our Unitarian denomination, and to the high faith which our churches exist to promote and extend. We Unitarians have been rather timid about talking much of denominational loyalty, fearful lest it should somehow impede or destroy our loyalty to the larger and more inclusive values which transcend all barriers of parish or denomination or country. But unless I am very much mistaken there is growing among us a deep conviction that the larger loyalties can only be built upon a founda-

tion of the right kind of lesser loyalties, and within our own fellowship this means a development of loyalty to our local churches and to our denomination as essential instruments for the creation of the greater values. Such is my own conviction, and the attempt to put it into practice appeals to me as a great and thrilling adventure.

That is where the appropriateness of the title of John Buchan's book comes in. We are engaged in an enterprise which makes us adventurers together, and as we salute each other we recognize the adventurous — yes, the hazardous — nature of our common undertaking.

"ANSWERABLE COURAGES"

GREAT risks have never been a good reason for not going ahead, provided the objective has been sufficiently high and alluring. William Bradford, you will remember, records the way in which the argument against leaving Holland for America was met by the bolder spirits among the Pilgrim Fathers: "It was answered, that all great and honourable actions are accompanied with great difficulties, and must be both enterprised and overcome with answerable courages." I like that plural at the end. Not merely "courage," as though he were speaking of a virtue in the abstract; but "courages" — more than one kind of courage to answer to more than one kind of danger, and concrete examples of courage to correspond to the highly

specific and definite difficulties which the new adventure would certainly bring.

And the source of that spirit? Bradford tells us, a page or two earlier in his narrative: "Lastly, (and which was not least,) a great hope and inward zeall they had of laying some good foundations . . . for the propagating and advancing the gospell of the kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world; yea, though they should be but even as stepping-stones unto others for the performing of so great a work."

New occasions have brought their lesson of new duties. Today we face a world that is very unlike that of the Pilgrims. In many respects our ways are not their ways, nor their thoughts our thoughts. But the spirit of adventure can still stir our hearts. The need for courage to face new and unpredictable dangers is as great as ever. And hope and zeal in a great cause are yet mighty to fortify men's souls as they confront great difficulties. These are some of the abiding realities in a world of terrifying change.

"EARTHQUAKE WEATHER"

EACH generation, as it comes along, agrees that the work of the earlier generation was "but even as stepping-stones," and then in turn begins to suspect that its own utmost endeavors will not prove to have been much more. Mankind is still engaged in trying to lay "some good foundations." Just at this moment

most thoughtful people are becoming alarmingly aware of doubts as to the stability and durability of the foundations upon which the contemporary world is seeking to erect its top-heavy structure so blithely labelled "modern civilization." Stanley Casson's recent book entitled *Progress and Catastrophe* is an evidence of the deep-running spirit of something not unlike panic which is shared by almost all of us. It is earthquake weather, and we are beginning to realize it.

How can we set to work to build better foundations? What practical program can we adopt with some real hope that we shall be as successful in our day as our great-grandfathers were in theirs? Unless we can find such a program, and carry it out, their work will perish with us. The first thing to do is to state as plainly as we can the most imperative requirement. The second, is to determine the agencies through which that requirement can best be met. The third, is to give ourselves to the practical task of strengthening those agencies and through them achieving the necessary end.

THE GREAT REQUIREMENT

NOWHERE have I found words to express so clearly the fundamental need of our day as in John Milton's *Reason of Church Government*. He is speaking of the power of poetic inspiration, which he thinks of as standing "beside the office of a pulpit"; and he says

that power is "to imbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility." That, to be sure, is seventeenth century prose; and we should choose other words to express the same idea. But the tone and force of Milton's phrases are unmistakable, and he has put his finger with merciless skill upon the basic need of our day as surely as of his. It seems to me that he is saying exactly what Sir Josiah Stamp and Professor Tawney and Dr. Lindsay have been saying in the England of the twentieth century. Is there anything America needs more desperately?

CHURCHES — ESPECIALLY UNITARIAN

NOW surely there can be no doubt that any such need is at its center a matter of religion, and if the need be religious the best instrument for its satisfaction will be some sort of church. We may need very drastic reformation of some or all of the existing institutions that go by that name — for my own part I believe the process of reformation will have to be universal and very drastic indeed. But it will be through churches — and especially through churches which can most easily adapt themselves to new conditions, forgetting the ancient truth which Time has made irrelevant and reaching eagerly forward to the new truth which is just at hand — it will be through churches, as human institutions, that the great requirement of our day will be met.

And that argument gives to us Unitarians a unique opportunity and an almost overwhelming obligation. It provides us with an incentive like that which drove our fathers across the sea. We have in our hands the means by which most quickly and most surely we may begin to "imbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility." A Unitarian church is the best available tool to start the process of restoring faith and a high disinterestedness to the soul of America.

But there is no time to waste. The urgency of a crisis is upon us. The echoes of a trumpet-call are in the air. Each in his own parish church — or, as many of us are, in isolated communities far from a church of our own beloved faith — each one of us must begin to work and to think, to give of time and money and devotion as never before, above all to teach his heart to care more deeply for the church of his birthright and of his free choice, that it may hold aloft a great light in a darkened and troubled world.

F. M. E.

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